



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE HAMLET PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION. By Emerson Venable.
Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Co. 1912.

The solution here presented may be described as a variant on that theory which considers Hamlet's delay due to the scruples of conscience, and on that particular form of this theory which supposes these scruples to be subconscious. The originality of the present solution consists in supposing that Hamlet first regards the ghost's command to imply a purely personal vengeance, against which his moral nature instinctively though unconsciously rebels, and that later he comes gradually to realize that the command also contains a larger ethical purpose, by means of which the time, which is out of joint, shall, by his killing of Claudius, be set right. Moreover, the author sees in the drama a universal application which makes Hamlet's upward struggle symbolic of the moral struggle of humanity as a whole.

To accept this solution one must take an altogether unwarranted view of most of Hamlet's words, and one must explain the absence of any words stating the fact that, after being withheld by subconscious moral scruples, he begins to feel later that the killing of the king is a part of the divine purpose. Hamlet, of course, again and again questions the reason of his own delay and eagerly looks for any possible excuse, but nowhere does he suggest the possibility of such excuse in the wrongfulness of the deed itself. The only words which could be construed to suggest this are those addressed to Horatio (V. ii. 67): "Is't not perfect conscience to quit him with this arm?" Mr. Venable concludes his study with a consideration of this passage, but what is most surprising is that he ignores the discussion of the bearing of this passage upon the conscience theory by Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, pages 98, 99), although Bradley's well-known work is elsewhere quoted and praised.

Still more surprising is the author's neglect of Bradley's discussion of the word 'conscience' in the soliloquy concerning

suicide (III. i. 56). The word as here used is taken by Bradley and other critics to be equivalent to 'thought', and is so defined in Schmidt's *Shakespeare-Lexicon*, but the present author tacitly assumes it to possess the modern sense. Assuming this, he finds in the soliloquy an expression of Hamlet's sense of the immanence of divine law, and proceeds to elaborate the vague "dread of something after death" into a purely moral objection to suicide. In passing, it is worth noting that the First Quarto, which probably shows Shakespeare's earlier conceptions, makes more specific reference to orthodox ideas of another world when the dead are "borne before an everlasting judge", and where "the happy smile and the accursed are damned." If Shakespeare had regarded Hamlet as does Mr. Venable he would scarcely have eliminated these words.

One effect of the present solution is to minimize the lethargic character of Hamlet's delay. Mr. Venable incidentally mentions the time supposed to have elapsed between acts one and two as "measured by days rather than hours." But the commonly accepted time analysis of the play measures it by months—one or perhaps two. Yet through all this delay, filled as we feel sure both with "bestial oblivion" and "thinking too precisely on the event", through all this we must suppose an energetic character restrained by a moral scruple powerful enough to nullify the ghost's command and yet not obvious enough to be discovered by the self-observed of all self-observers. A striking example of the necessity of twisting the meaning of a passage to suit the author's purpose is seen in the comments on the soliloquy in act four, scene four. Here we are told, "Hamlet is now far removed, mentally and spiritually, from any impulsive act of mere personal revenge,—notwithstanding the final exclamatory words of vain resolve with which he essays to revive a dying purpose." Those words, it may be recalled, are:—

"O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth."

The climax of the play is, according to this theory, at the killing of Polonius. After this the Personal yields to the Impersonal motive until, in the philosophical utterance made to Horatio in act five, we see Hamlet's mind "now serene—his will no

longer in opposition to the will of Heaven." But surely, for one who has gradually come to see that the will of Heaven is for him to kill the King and is inspired by this thought, Hamlet continues to proceed on his mission in a remarkably dilatory manner, and finally stumbles into its accomplishment most fortuitously.

Although unconvincing, this study is well written and ingeniously constructed, and its reading will prove stimulating to all interested in the supreme figure of all fiction. But it is not a solution. The author's desire to find good in everything in Hamlet's character is only less misleading than Churton Collins's effort to see all that is vile in the same object. Surely that most interesting of things, the problematic character, is neither entirely the one nor the other. The final interest in Hamlet is not one of ethics but of personality. And there can no more be a solution of a personality than there can be a solution of a sunset or an amoeba. There will never be a solution of Hamlet, although there will be in the future, as there has been in the past, an increased appreciation. Since this is so, it might be suggested that, as the Patent Office keeps a printed form giving the reasons for the impossibility of the discovery of Perpetual Motion, so it would be well to have conspicuously hung in all publishing houses a statement explaining the insolubility of the Hamlet Problem. L. WARDLAW MILES.

A HISTORY OF FRENCH LITERATURE. By C. H. Conrad Wright, of Harvard University. 8vo. pp. 964 + xiv. New York and London: Oxford University Press, American Branch.

This is the opening volume in a great series of French texts and criticisms of French literature which has been projected by the American Branch of the Oxford University Press. The series is under the general editorship of Professor Raymond Weeks, of Columbia University. Our readers are perhaps already familiar with the similar collection issued by this publishing house, called the Oxford German Series, which has been in successful operation for three or four years.

In this large and comprehensive work Professor Wright has put a capstone to a high reputation won as an editor of numer-